



Questions & Answers

Fee Increase

Water Works Operator Certification Program

September 2005

The Water Works Operator Certification Program is proposing a fee increase because of increased costs and a loss of funding. We realize the amount of this increase is unusual, so we are providing you with information that explains why this is happening.

Water Works Operator Certification Program

The Office of Drinking Water (ODW) has oversight of Group A Public Water Systems, including several different types of activities to ensure they provide safe and reliable drinking water in order to protect public health. The operator certification program created in 1977 protects public health by testing individuals and evaluating their technical competence to run a water system, and by assuring that each water system is operated by staff having adequate skills, training, and experience, based on system size and complexity. The fees that are collected from certified operators, backflow assembly testers, and public water systems must be periodically adjusted to guarantee enough revenue to cover the cost of the program.

What does the Operator Certification Program provide to me?

The Office of Drinking Water regulates, communicates with, and provides technical assistance to public water systems and water works operators. Services provided to public water systems include: determining the number, type, and level of mandatory positions; assuring mandatory positions are filled; maintaining an online list of contract operators; working with systems to remain in or return to compliance; and taking enforcement actions when necessary. Services provided to water works operators include: providing information on how to become or remain certified; evaluating operator qualifications; administering exams; processing annual certification renewals; tracking an individual operator's professional growth and providing periodic status reports; maintaining online records of an individual operator's professional growth; maintaining online lists of certified contract operators and backflow assembly testers to advertise their services; and taking enforcement actions when necessary.

Why is the ODW increasing fees now?

The law requires us to run a self-supporting program. The proposed increase is needed to offset costs associated with salary and substantial rent increases, necessary upgrades to our information management computer system, and increased costs of federal requirements. A federal grant that was used to subsidize the program is no longer available. This situation has created a substantial short fall in revenue.

How much money does it take to run the Operator Certification Program?

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Current program costs: | \$1,337,405 |
| Total revenue from fees: | <u>\$1,040,000</u> |
| Revenue short fall: | <u>\$297,405</u> |
| Required % fee increase: | 28.6% |



HELPING TO ENSURE SAFE AND RELIABLE DRINKING WATER

How long has it been since the last fee increase?

We increase fees each year to the Initiative 601 spending limit set by the state Office of Financial Management, which is based on actual inflation rates. Last year the increase was 3.20%. This yearly fee increase is necessary to offset inflationary costs associated with running the operator certification program. This year's proposed fee increase should allow the operator certification program to recover costs for the foreseeable future with only small fee adjustments to cover inflation in future years.

Have you looked at options for running the program more efficiently?

The largest cost that the program bears is staff salaries and benefits. We've streamlined the program by cutting staff positions from 6.5 to 4.5. This reduction in staff is due to efficiencies that have been made since 2001. ODW will continue to evaluate ways in which we can reduce costs through efficiencies.

What are the proposed fees going to be?

Annual Water Works Operator Certification Fees

| Operator Classification | Current application fee | New fee |
|-------------------------------------|--|----------------|
| Water Treatment Plant Operator | \$68 | \$87 |
| Water Distribution Manager | \$68 | \$87 |
| Water Distribution Specialist | \$68 | \$87 |
| Cross-connection Control Specialist | \$40 | \$51 |
| Backflow Assembly Tester | \$40 | \$51 |
| Basic Treatment Operator | \$40 | \$51 |
| | Current reapplication and annual renewal fees | New fee |
| All classes | \$33 | \$42 |
| | Current late fee | New fee |
| All classes | \$27 | \$35 |

Fees are rounded to the nearest dollar.

The application fee for reciprocity would be increased to \$177 per classification. The fee for issuance of a temporary certificate would be increased to \$87 for each temporary position.

The increases will vary from an increase of \$29 for systems with up to 600 services to an increase of \$180 for systems with more than 20,000 services.

Table 3 Annual Water System Fees for Operator Certification

| System Size | Current fee | New fee |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Less than 601 Services | \$103 | \$132 |
| 601 through 6,000 Services | \$313 | \$403 |
| 6,001 through 20,000 Services | \$417 | \$536 |
| More than 20,000 Services | \$629 | \$809 |

Fees are rounded to the nearest dollar.

Where and when is my opportunity to give my opinion on this fee increase?

We have scheduled a public hearing in Tumwater on October 25th at 1:00 p.m. to take your comments as outlined in the public hearing notice. We will have an informational session so that you can learn more about the proposed fee increase, followed by a public hearing which is your opportunity to comment. If you aren't able to attend the hearing, you can send us your comments via mail, the internet, e-mail, or fax. For specific details, refer to the public hearing notice.